

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8328

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLINHHOPP

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 3846/1

E.O. 11652: NGS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE EFFORTS OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ TO STRENGTHEN HIS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF COLOMBIA WERE MUCH IN EVIDENCE DURING THE PAST WEEK. THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE MADE TWO PUBLIC APPEARANCES, IN BARRANQUILLA AND BOGOTA, DURING WHICH HE EMPHASIZED HIS INTENTIONS TO DEFEND COLOMBIA'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. THE EXTREMISTS, THE PRESIDENT PLEDGED, WOULD NOT SUCCEED. HIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD, HE SAID, CONTINUE TO DEFEND "DEMOCRATIC STABILITY" IN COLOMBIA. PRESIDENT LOPEZ, A YEAR AFTER HIS LANDSLIDE ELECTORAL VICTORY, HOPES TO AVOID USE OF A STATE OF SEIGE TO MAINTAIN ORDER IN COLOMBIA. THE TRADITIONALLY FACTIONALIZED LIBERAL PARTY SPONSORED A MTG OF LIBERAL EX-PRESIDENTS WHICH RECOMMENDED A NUMBER OF CHANGES IN THE PARTY STRUCTURE. SUCH CHANGES, IF EFFECTED, COULD BRING ABOUT A LESSENING OF THE CHRONIC INTRA-PARTY STRIFE THAT HAS DETRACTED FROM THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE RULING PARTY. IN THE AREA OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS NEITHER THE CANCELLATION OF THE SECRETARY'S L.A. VISIT OR THE BRIEF PRESENCE IN BOGOTA OF PANAMANIAN

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FONMIN TACK OCCASIONED ANY SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF PUBLIC

INTEREST. THE GOC DECISION TO RAISE PRICES ON THE LESS POLITICALLY SENSITIVE PETROLEUM PRODUCTS UNDERSCORDD THE PERSISTENCE OF THE PROBLEM OF PETROLEUM PRICES, A PROBLEM THAT LOPEZ HAS NOT YET COME TO GRIPS WITH. THE BURNING OF SEVERAL CARS BY NATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS KEPT THE ISSUE OF PUBLIC ORDER BEFORE THE PUBLIC AND LED THE UNIVERSITY'S MARXIST RECTOR TO CALL FOR MORE SUPPORT FROM THE (NON-ACTIVIST) "SILENT MAJORITY" OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY. END SUMMARY

2. LIBERAL PARTY SUMMIT MEETING CAPS ACTIVE POLICITAL WEEK. A LIBERAL PARTY SUMMIT MTG APRIL 24 INCLUDING FORMER PRESIDENTS CARLOS LLERAS, JULIO CESAR TURBAY AND DARIO ECHANDIA CULMINATED AN UNEXPECTEDLY POLITICIZED WEEK IN COLOMBIA. EX-PRESIDENT ALBERTO LLERAS DECLINED THE INVITATION TO THE MTG ARRANGED BY THE LIBERAL PARTY DIRECTORATE (DNL) BECAUSE OF HIS DECISION MADE SEVERAL MONTHS AGO TO RETIRE FROM ACTIVE POLITICS. AT THE MTG THE PARTY LEADERS RECONFIRMED THEIR SUPPORT, MADE IN EARLIER PUBLIC STATEMENTS, FOR A CHANGE IN THE CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD SEPARATE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION FROM THAT OF OTHER ELECTIVE OFFICES, INCLUDING THE CONGRESS. THEY ALSO UNANIMOUSLY AGREED TO REORGANIZE THE PARTY AND ITS STATUTES TO BROADEN THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR THE PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE IN 1978. FINALLY, THEY AGREED TO NAME A COMMISSION AT THEIR NEXT MTG, MAY6, TO WORK OUT THE DETAILS AND DISCUSS THE PLANS WITH PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND WITH OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES. OF PERHAPS GREATER IMPORTANCE, LLERAS AND TURBAY WHO HAD NOT CONFERRED SINCE THE LIBERAL CONVENTION IN JULY 1973 AGREED TO DISCUSS THEIR DISAGREEMENTS WITHIN THE PARTY FRAMEWORK THUS AVOIDING, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING, FURTHER PARTY DIVISIVENESS. LLERAS PLEDGED TO REMAIN ACTIVE IN THE PARTY'S COMMISSION. TURBAY, MEANWHILE, DEPARTS APRIL 27 TO BE AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. NEVERTHELESS, ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE TENSIONS IN THE PARTY, THE MTG REPORTEDLY ALMOST ENDED BEFORE IT BEGAN WHEN TURBAYISTAS PROPOSED THAT THE PARTICIPANTS SIGN A DECLARATION OF SOLIDARITY WITH LOPEZ. LLERAS DECLINED STATING THAT HE WAS "NOT GOING TO BE PINNED TO THE WALL" IN A MTG CALLED FOR OTHERPURPOSES, AND BESIDES, CONFIDENTIAL

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HE SAID "MY VIEWS (SOME UNFAVORABLE TO LOPEZ) HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED IN NUEVA FRONTERA." THE WEEK BEGAN WITH PRISDENT LOPEZ DEFENDING HIS ADMINISTRATION AND COLOMBIAN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS BEFORE LARGE CROWDS IN BARRANQUILLA AND BOGOTA (BOGOTA 3698) AND URGIN SUPPORTERS TO BECOME ACTIVE TO CONVINCE EXTREMISTS THAT "THEY WILL NOT SUCCEED", IN THEIR EFFORTS TO DISRUPT COLOMBIA'S INSTITUTIONS. FORMER PRESIDENT PASTRANA ALSO GOT INTO THE POLITICAL

ARENA AGAIN THROUGH A LETTER TO MEDELLIN'S EL COLOMBIANO PUBLISHED APRIL 19 IN WHICH HE CALLED FOR GREATER PARTICIPATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN LINE WITH THE PARITY REPRESENTATION REQUIREMENTS IN THE CONSTITUTION. HE CHARGED THAT CONSERVATIVE MINISTERS WERE NOT BEING CONSULTED ON DECISIONS AFFECTING THEIR MINISTRIES. LOPEZ RESPONDED THAT PASTRANA WAS NOT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY SPOKESMAN, AND THAT HE HAD HAD CONSULTATIONS WITH THE PARTY'S TITULAR HEAD--FORMER PRESIDENT MARIANO OSPINA. MEANWHILE, THE SIX CONSERVATIVE MINISTERS, IN A JOINT LETTER, REFUTED PASTRANA'S CHARGES, AND DECLARED THEIR SUPPORT FOR LOPEZ INITIATIVES AND GENERAL POLICY. SOME OBSERVERS SPECULATED THAT PASTRANA'S LETTER WAS DESIGNED TO TEST THE POLITICAL CLIMATE AMONG CONSERVATIVES TO SEE WHETHER THE TIME WAS RIPE FOR HIS ACTIVE REAPPEARANCE ON THE POLITICAL SCENE. JUDGING FROM THE MINISTERS' REPLY AND THAT OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY DIRECTORATE (DNC), AN INNOCUOUS STATEMENT THAT ALL CONSERVATIVE VIEWPOINTS WERE WELCOME, MOST CONSERVATIVE LEADERS APPARENTLY FEEL THAT THEIR BEST STRATEGY FOR THE NEAR FUTURE IS TO CONTINUE CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, AND THAT PASTRANA IS NOT YET CONSIDERED THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADER.

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ACTION ARA-10

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3. FONMIN TACK VISITS BOGOTA. PANAMANIAN FONMIN JUAN ANTOINO TACK VISITED BOGOTA APRIL 23 FOR A ONE-DAY VISIT DURING WHICH HE MET WITH PRESIDENT LOPEZ, FONMIN LIEVANO AND OTHER GOC OFFICIALS. THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT WAS APPARENTLY TO CONSOLIDATE COLOMBIAN SUPPORT FOR PANAMA REGARDING THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AND TO COORDINATE THE POSITIONS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES ON SUBJECTS TO BE RAISED AT THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY NEXT MONTH. ALTHOUGH THE QUESTION OF CUBAN SANCTIONS IS NOT ON THE AGENDA TACK SAID IN AN INTERVIEW THAT COLOMBIA AND PANAM WOULD PROBABLY ATTEMPT TO BRING THE SUBJECT TO DISCUSSION "IN SOME FORM".

4. GUERRILLAS REAMIN QUIET. ANOTHER WEEK PASSED WITHOUT ANY GUERRILLA ACTIVITY OF NOTE. HOWEVER, THE PREVIOUSLY DEMONSTRATED CAPABILITY OF GUERRILLA GROUPS, ESPECIALLY THE FARC, TO MOUNT RELATIVELY LARGE, COORDINATED ATTACKS ON SMALL OUTLYING TOWNS (BOGOTA 3340) CONTINUED TO BE A SUBJECT OF CONCERN TO THE GOC.

5. REACTION TO CAR BURNINGS AT NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. FOLLOWING THE BURNING OF CARS NEAR BOGOTA'S NATIONAL UNIVERSITY'S MARXIST RECTOR, LUIS CARLOS PEREZ

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THREATENED RESIGNATION UNLESS VIOLENCE AND ANARCHY BY THE MINORITY CEASED AND THE "SILENT MAJORITY" OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY WERE MORE ACTIVE IN PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY OF THE UNIVERSITY AS AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION. (BOGOTA 3733) IN THE WAKE OF THE INCIDENT AND PEREZ THREAT, CONDEMANTION OF STUDENT INSTIGATED VIOLENCE AND SUPPORT FOR THE RECTOR CAME FROM A VARIETY OF SECTORS INCLUDING THE NEW UNIVERSITG LIBERAL FRONT, THE COMMUNIST YOUTH, MAJOR NEWSPAPERS, AND ESPECIALLY PRESIDENT LOPEZ THROUGH HIS MINISTER OF EDUCATION. THIS SUPPORT HAS STRENTHEINED THE RECTORS POSITION AND HE HAS REPORTEDLY DISCARDED THE POSSIBILITY OF RESIGNING.

6. PRICE INCREASE FOR PETROLEUM PRODUCTS. THE GOC ANNOUNCED APRIL 22 A 15 PERCENT INCREASE IN REFINERY PRICE FOR ALL PETROLEUM PRODUCTS EXCEPT MOTOR GASOLINE, LPG, AND A FEW MINOR PETROCHEMICALS. A CORRESPONDING INCREASE IN RETAIL PRICES IS EXPECTED SHORTLY. HIGH GOC OFFICIALS HAVE INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT NO SIGNIFICANT PRICE INCREASE IN THE SENSITIVE AREA OF MOTOR GASOLINE IS EXPECTED DURING 1975. THE NEW PRICE LEVEL WILL ELIMINATE THE LOSS BEING INCURRED BY ECOPETROL FOR SUCH PRODUCTS SINCE

1971 BUT NOT PROVIDE A PROFIT AT REFINERY. ALTHOUGH
LABOR OFFICIALS HAVE VOICED CONCERN TO THE MINISTRY OF MINES,
NO PUBLIC OPOSITION TO THE INCREASE HAS YET BEEN EXPRESSED.
PRESUMABLY CONCERN WILL SURFACE AT THE TIME CONSUMER
PRICES ARE INCREASED, BUT PLANNING OFFICE OFFICIALS
ESTIMATE THAT THE PRESENT INCREASE WILL RESULT IN ONLY
ABOUT A ONE PERCENT RISE IN THE COST OF LIVING INDIX.
AT THE SAME TIME THAT HE CNNOUNCED THE NEW PRICES THE
MINISTER OF MINES EXPRESSED OPTIMISM REGARDING THE STATUS
OF ECOPETROL'S NEGOTIATION WITHTHE COMPANIS FOR AN
INCREASED STATE PARTICIPATION IN PRODUCTION. THE EMBASSY
UNDERSTANDS, HOWEVER, THAT FIRM NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEGUN
WITH ONLY ONE COMPANY, THE EXXON AFFILIATE, AND ARE STILL
IN THE PRELIMINARY STAGES.

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